

# MADISON COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

## After Action Review of the Sheridan Quake and the Ennis 4<sup>th</sup> of July Exercise

Directed by: Chris Mumme, Director of Emergency Management

### Attendees:

Jill Steeley, Madison County Public Health Office  
Melinda Tichenor, CERT  
Sheri Luksha, CERT, MC S&R  
Tom Luksha, CERT, MC S&R  
Frank Ford, Madison County Communications Coordinator  
Steve DiGiovanna, Madison County Sheriffs Office  
Shawn Christensen, MVRFD, MC S&R  
Steve Orr, Madison County Sheriffs Office, MC S&R  
Chris Mumme, Madison County Department of Emergency Services  
Barbie Durham, Madison County Grant Coordinator

The following report presents an analysis of the response efforts of citizens, local jurisdictions, Madison County, and state and federal agencies to the Sheridan Earthquake, and the Ennis 4<sup>th</sup> of July Exercise. Madison County Director of Emergency Management, Chris Mumme organized and directed the review meeting. Director Mumme asked that each citizen, jurisdiction, and agency attend their respective group meetings and report on the After Action Review findings.

### **Sheridan Quake**

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007 a 4.6, earthquake occurred 9 miles Northeast of Sheridan, Montana. Agencies responding were: Madison County Emergency Management, Madison Valley Rural Fire, CERT, Citizen Corp Council, USFS, Red Cross, Montana State Emergency Management, Madison County Public Health, Madison County Sheriffs Department, Madison County Search & Rescue, and Madison County Communications Department.

Although the Sheridan Quake registered 4.6, the area sustained relatively little damage. Had the epicenter of the quake been located in a more populated area it is safe to assume major damage could have occurred. Therefore, actions to identify lessons learned and to improve our countywide response capability are imperative.

Through the work of the above mentioned agencies, themes were identified as processes that went right, and processes that need improvement. We must expand capabilities and capacities for public education, overall situational awareness, and better understand the expectations of our citizens and those involved in emergency responses. We must also work toward expanding coordination across federal, state, and local emergency response agencies and continuing to strengthen partnerships between the public and private sectors.

## **What went right?**

The Sheridan community felt the County cared about them and their safety. The community was pleased with the door to door inquiries by CERT members.

Once Incident Command was established procedures flowed smoothly. E911 maps were a tremendous help when sending teams out to investigate.

The grid system worked very well. Shawn Christensen, MVRFD and MC S&R responded professionally to residents concern regarding gas smells.

There was not only tremendous community gratitude, but also the community volunteers appreciated being called to assist enabling them to use the training they have received. Emergency personnel paid tribute to the training they have received by responding and performing in a very efficient and professional manner. Sheri Luksha, CERT and MC S&R did a great job conducting the very tedious job of dealing with resources as they arrived.

It proved very beneficial to have Frank Ford in the office as EOC making calls to DNRC, Forest Service etc. Chris felt that mutual aid worked very well.

Jodi Briggs, USFS performed great as the Information Officer.

Captain Orr performed in an exceptional manner as a Communications Officer and liaison for the Sheriff's office and provided valuable input in the decision making process at the Command Post.

Prior training of emergency personnel was a critical factor in their response. Emergency personnel such as CERT members paid tribute to the training they have received by responding and performing in a very professional manner.

Moving the ICP to the Sheridan Park was a very good idea (shade, space, restrooms.)

The Emergency Response personnel and the community did a great job taking care of the one displaced family.

This was a good rehearsal for something more impactful.

## **What needs improvement:**

Faster communication across multi agency boundaries regarding damages, injuries, and needs. The more details known, the faster agencies can react and respond utilizing available resources.

Earthquake events take time to assess and even more time to mobilize a response. Nearly two hours passes between the initial seismic event and the establishing of Command. Is there a way to improve upon our response time?

Captain Orr could have been assigned as a Deputy Incident Commander (Deputy I.C.). This would have allowed for joint contiguous command decisions at the command post, and command continuity while DES 1 made brief, necessary field assessments. Captain Orr would have been a qualified, valuable liaison from the Sheriffs Office.

The Sheridan Fire Department Administration (Chief or Assistant Chief) could have paged to respond to the command post for an assessment/briefing on the event and situation. This would have allowed the IC the ability to evaluate how and if the fire department could/would assist. Future dialogue with the county Fire Chiefs may provide insight into their perceived responsibility, operational capability and willingness to respond to non-fire emergencies.

It would have been prudent for the fire departments of Sheridan and Alder, to remove their apparatus from the fire house structures for a relatively short period of time (6 hours) immediately following the quake.

Apparatus removal would be precautionary in order to assure that emergency apparatus do not fall victim to entrapment in the event that the original quake was an immediate predecessor to a larger event.

Protocol for accomplishing this practice in cold winter temperatures should be established.

For a relatively inexpensive cost, a pre-plan Earthquake Assessment Book/Folder could be established and would have rapidly identified all of the pre-33 un-reinforced masonry structures of Sheridan – i.e. where the utility shut offs (gas water power) are located – hazardous material storage, locations where there is potential for occupant entrapment (basements, apartment flats, etc.)

Important personnel contacts, phone numbers, phone books, private contractor contacts, heavy equipment operators/contractors, local structural building contractors/engineers, fuel suppliers, water storage contractors, local utility/street/highway/sanitation personnel, law enforcement, EMS, nurses, physicians, firefighters and county workers contacts could be kept in a critical contact book.

This Disaster Folder could be highly valuable in the event of an “area wide” disaster where outside help is delayed or re-directed to more urban areas.

County School Administrators should be consulted – reference their procedures for evaluating damaged/unsafe school buildings and the safe evacuation and “after event accountability” of students and staff.

There is a timely need for re-assessment of the Madison County Call Taking/Dispatch. Communications Center – and its ability to continue operating (safely and operationally) after a substantial seismic event.

As most are aware, the courthouse is a pre-1933 un-reinforced masonry building and the dispatcher was the only employee who was unable to evacuate the building following this event. A delay in development of an alternate call taking/communications locale could cripple the county and possibly be potentially disastrous for our residents in need.

Even an inexpensive portable telephone, hard wired to a 911 telephone connection box outside the courthouse building, could be a temporary alternative to insure continued 911 communications until a more permanent solution is determined.

Once Teams had been deployed, the Teams should not have been contacting the Staging Manager for operational direction. Operational direction should have been administered by Division Supervisors (see example below.)

After the assembly of the nine (9) search teams, it may have been a good idea to divide the 9 teams into two separate Divisions to maintain ICS "span of control".

Roy Parrett could have been assigned as "A Division" Supervisor and conducted S&R/P.R. operations on Mill Street and the area north.

Shawn Christensen could have been "B Division" Supervisor and could have operated S&R/P.R. operations in all areas South of Mill Street.

These Division Supervisors could then interact with the Command Post as needed and the operation progressed.

## **Ennis 4<sup>th</sup> of July Exercise**

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007 performed an exercise helping with situations in Ennis and the surrounding area. Three staging areas were established they are as follows.

1. North side of Ennis
2. South side of the Madison River Bridge
3. West side of Ennis

The staging area was manned by Fire and Medical resources. Agencies that participated included: Madison Valley Rural Volunteer Fire Department, Harrison Volunteer Fire Department, Virginia City Volunteer Fire Department, and Ennis Ambulance Service, CERT, Madison County Sheriffs Office, Montana Highway Patrol, and Madison County Emergency Management.

Traffic control and ready response assistance were provided. An Incident Management Team was established to manage all Emergency Services and disciplines. The IMT selected established a Unified Incident Command overseeing: a Law Enforcement Section, Medical Section, Fire Department Section, and a CERT Section.

The Incident Command Post was established at the Ennis Town Hall. The ICP was capable of radio communication on all assigned frequencies for all Emergency Services Agencies assigned to the incident. The ICP was capable of supporting multiple responses by multiple agencies and disciplines to simultaneous incidents.

### **What went right:**

Traffic control before, during, and after the parade went very well. Some traffic could be rerouted around town. This helped keep people happy and lessened backed up traffic.

Response time to incidents was shortened, allowing Emergency Service personnel the ability to move quicker.

### **What can be improved:**

Radio communication was a problem at times. Chris felt like the problems stemmed from being inside the Mobile Command trailer. Chatter made it difficult to communicate. Shawn reported that communicating from inside the Mobile Command proved difficult, but if you stepped outside you could communicate well.

Steve reported that the State owned Mobile Command unit is not equipped with radios because the unit is used all over the state. The State feels it is prudent to have the local jurisdictions provide their own radios. Radios that did work well inside the unit had exterior antenna. Headsets are one solution for tactical frequencies only. Command should be communicating with the Section Chiefs of each tactical agency.